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Forces Sauces and Eggs for Soldiers: Food, Nostalgia and the Rehabilitation of the British Military

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This article identifies, and considers the political implications of, the association of the contemporary British military and British soldiers with nostalgia. This aspect of the discursive project of rehabilitating the British military post-Iraq has not hitherto been theorised. The article analyses a set of exemplifying texts, four military charity food brands (Eggs for Soldiers, Forces Sauces, Red Lion Foods and Rare Tea Company Battle of Britain Tea) to ask how nostalgic rehabilitation of the British military unfolds at the intersections of militarisation, commemoration, and post-2008 'conscience capitalism'. I outline how military charity food brands are a form of 'conscience capitalism' through which the perpetuation of militarised logics are produced as a notionally apolitical social 'cause', rendered intelligible within the terms of existing commoditised discourses of post-2008 vintage nostalgia. I then ask what understandings of British soldiers and the British military are constituted within the discourse of nostalgic rehabilitation, and secondly what forms of commemoration are entailed. I argue that a nostalgic generalisation of soldiers and the military nullifies the potential unruliness of individual soldiers and obscures the specifics of recent, controversial, wars. Secondly nostalgic civil-military engagement entails a commemorative logic in which forms of quasi-military service are brought into the most banal spaces of everyday civilian life.

Key words: Military Charities, Nostalgia, Militarisation, Help for Heroes, Conscience Capitalism

Introduction

British shoppers are being marketed an increasing range of everyday food items associated with, and raising money for, the rapidly expanding number of military charities (Gribble et al, 2014) in the UK. As of summer 2014 UK supermarkets including Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose, Tesco and the Co-operative were stocking these items[i]. Such products, with taglines such as 'Eat Well and Do Good' (Red Lion Foods) and 'Tea for Heroes' (Rare Tea Company), are typically packaged in styles that evoke World War One and Two government recruitment and Ministry of Information campaigns. These campaigns called on citizens to support the nation and the armed forces through banal everyday domestic and culinary observances such as eating less bread (Oddy 2003, 2)[ii]. Contemporary military charity food brands urge the consumer to commemorate past wars and military sacrifices, and support the 'cause' of today's British military, by buying their particular corned beef, eggs or tea.

This phenomenon merits scholarly attention as a manifestation of a much broader set of dynamics at the intersections of militarisation, commemoration, and 'conscience capitalism' in contemporary British society. In this article I address these dynamics to

argue that military charity food brand products are part of the positioning of both the British military as an institution, and the wars it has fought, within popular post-2008 vintage nostalgia (see Brammal 2013). This contributes to the public rehabilitation of the British military and its wars post-Iraq by reconnecting the military and the public (Jenkings, et al 2012).

First I outline how military charity food brands are a form of 'conscience capitalism' (Farrell 2014) in which market solutions are brought to bear on charitable causes (and vice versa). Framed within 'conscience capitalism' military charity food brands entail the perpetuation of militarised logics as they produce the contemporary British military as a notionally apolitical social 'cause', rendered intelligible within the terms of existing commoditised discourses of post-2008 vintage nostalgia. I define vintage nostalgia as the nostalgia for past cultural artefacts, aesthetics and values, particularly those that evoke wartime and post-war domestic life, austerity and government information campaigns. I then discuss how these nostalgic treatments constitute the British soldier and the British military as an institution. I argue that running counter to the individualising and domestication of British soldiers identified by, for example, King (2010) in contemporary commemorative public understandings of soldiers and the military, the nostalgic rehabilitation of the British military is predicated on the removal of the individual soldier from representations of the military and an exceptionally generalised account of the military as an institution. Whilst soldiers and the military are invoked at a general level – sufficient to confer military masculine authority – the potential discursive unruliness of representations of individual soldiers is nullified within an ahistoric void, filled by nostalgic invocations of the long-past, morally virtuous 'vintage' world wars. More recent politically contentious wars, the

things soldiers did, and the injuries they acquired during them are obscured. Finally, I consider the political implications of the practice of buying and consuming military charity food brands. I argue that calling on consumers to 'repay' a debt owed to the military (Rare Tea Company) and 'say thank you every day' (Red Lion Foods) through the purchase and consumption of these brands entails a depoliticised, quasi-military service which permeates military logics and values into the banal everyday spaces of the supermarket, kitchen and dinner table.

The research for this article involved consideration of an exemplifying set of military charity food products: Eggs for Soldiers, Forces Sauces, Red Lion Foods and Rare Tea Company Battle of Britain Tea, which are described below. The products and their packaging, websites for the brands and online product descriptions[iii] offered by retailers formed the main 'texts' to be analysed, chiefly through coding words, images and features such as packaging shape for themes and tropes. The object of this analysis was to explore these texts as statements in the shifting terrain of meaning and understanding relating to the British military, soldiers, and the relationship between the public and the British military as an institution. At its most overt, this manifested in statements such as 'most people want to say thank you everyday to the UK armed forces and their families' (Red Lion Foods), however I utilised a broad understanding of discourse as encompassing, without differentiation, language and practice as productive of meaning (see for example Hall 1997, 44).

As such I was engaged not purely with what was 'said' through linguistic statements in the texts, but also related and articulated practices and discourses (by articulation I mean, following Laclau and Mouffe [1985, 105], the establishment of associations

between discursive elements). Therefore, the approach of the article is to discuss linguistic statements relating to the brands but also the broader set of social practices such as buying and using the product and how these articulate with the discourse of 'conscience capitalism' (Farrell 2014), vintage nostalgia, and other relevant discourses to rehabilitate the British military, producing particular understandings of soldiers and the military through modes of market-based commemoration and engagement.

Military charity food products

Eggs for Soldiers, eggs packaged in a khaki box with military style chevrons and a Help For Heroes endorsement are, according to the Egg for Soldiers website, stocked in four of the UK's biggest supermarkets. The Eggs for Soldiers website states that 'a small change to your weekly shop can help make a big difference to our Armed Forces.' 15p per box is donated to Help for Heroes. Forces Sauces, tagline 'Serve with Pride', are a range of table sauces in stylised 'soldier-shaped' bottles (as described on the website of Stoll, a veteran's housing charity who own the brand) reminiscent of toy wooden soldiers. The range, which includes Brigadier Brown and Corporal Ketchup, were – according to the brand's website – 'conceived by Veterans'. 6p per bottle is donated to The Royal British Legion and Stoll. The Forces Sauces website states that their sauces are designed 'to spice up hearty portions of Great British food', and 'not only taste great but also do good – so they're an easy and enjoyable way to make a difference everyday'. The Rare Tea Company's Royal Air Force Tea for Heroes Battle of Britain Tea, marking the anniversary of the Battle of

Britain and decorated with a RAF roundel is described on the Rare Tea Company website as:

> A bespoke blend created exclusively for the Royal Air Force. This is tea as it used to be. Calming in times of national peril, fortifying when courage is required. When only the best will do. 7% of your money goes to the RAFA Wings Appeal. Repaying just a little of what so many of us owe so few.

Red Lion Foods, tagline 'Eat Well and Do Good', offers a range of food, including tinned meat, stew and chocolate and donates 100% of its post-tax profits to five military charities. The 'Eat Well and Do Good' tagline dominates the packaging and is a reworking of the visual trope of the ubiquitous and nostalgically rendered 'Keep Calm and Carry On' slogan (see Bramall 2013, 196). The stated premise of the company and its products are that 'most people want to say thank you everyday to the UK armed forces and their families' and that 'Red Lion Foods exists to give everyone the chance' to do so (as stated on the Waitrose webpage for Red Lion Foods Corned Beef). The company's website describes how the founder took 'his inspiration from First and Second World War recruitment posters' when designing the brand.

Rehabilitating the Military, Conscience Capitalism and Nostalgia

The prevalence of military charity food brands is part of what Jenkings et al (2012) identify in their work on Wootton Basset repatriations as 'the rehabilitation of the military in the aftermath of the Iraq war, and the legitimisation of the Afghanistan war' (2012, 361). The strand of this rehabilitation not so far theorised and which this

article addresses is rehabilitation achieved through a discursive coupling of the British military as an institution, and the soldiers who comprise it, with nostalgic invocations of past, morally virtuous wars, particularly World Wars One (the 100th anniversary of the start of which was in July 2014) and Two. This coupling of nostalgia and the British military occurs within the logics of 'conscience capitalism', which includes both the spread of marketised practices into the activities of charities and social campaign groups and the importation of conscience issues into capitalism, 'bringing capitalism to conscience and conscience to capitalism' (Farrell 2014, 5).

The wider project of rehabilitating the British military manifests in the individualisation and domestication of soldiers (King, 2010), the public commemoration of dead soldiers at Wootton Basset (Jenkings et al 2012), the Paralympics (Batts and Andrews 2012; Kelly 2013), the Invictus Games (one of the stated objectives of which is to 'generate a wider understanding and respect for those who serve their country'), the Troops to Teachers programme (Dermott 2012), and the popularity of visceral helmet-cam based documentaries following British soldiers 'on the job' in Iraq and Afghanistan (McSorely 2012).

One of the effects of the rehabilitation of the British military post-Iraq has been to produce a degree of disconnection between soldiers and the military, and the politics of war fighting with the inescapable killing and dying that is entailed. War fighting has become, in terms of 'wider civic understandings of military action and military organisations' (Jenkings et al 2012, 357), just one role of many for the contemporary rehabilitated British soldier hero who will follow service in Basra or Helmand with a career as an Paralympic sportsman (Batts and Andrews 2012; Kelly 2013), teacher

(Dermott 2012), fitness instructor (see, for example, brand leader British Military Fitness), entrepreneur (Hurley 2012), or table sauce manufacturer.

In each of these cases, the – hitherto civilian – spheres in question are seen to be improved by the insertion of British military values; values that are claimed to have a universal worth, enriching civilian life, lives and broader society. For example, the head of a venture capital firm set up to invest in former military entrepreneurs cited the 'integrity, energy, passion, leadership skills, adaptability and determination' developed in the military that could be brought to the business world (Hurley 2012). In the case of recruitment for the Troops to Teachers scheme the Department for Education website emphasises to potential new teachers that '[t]he skills and experiences you have gained during your time in the Armed Forces are invaluable, and our education system needs you to bring these to our schools.'[iv] In the same way, as identified above, military charity food brands such as Forces Sauces and Battle of Britain Tea identify veterans' aptitudes for designing ketchup or discerning a well-blended tea. As such, the dynamics I discuss here are a form of militarisation, in which 'military objectives extend into civilian life' (Jenkings et al 2012, 357) through structural relationships 'between government, the military, and entertainment industries', all of which entail 'the rhetorical production of war' (Fischer 2014, 413). As Enloe puts it, militarisation is the process whereby 'military needs and militaristic presumptions' come to be seen as 'not only valuable but also normal' and these logics 'creep into ordinary daily routines' (2000, 3)[v].

A significant number of the points of militarisation I have just outlined are rooted in the logics of 'conscience capitalism', in which, after the 2008 crash, neoliberal market

capitalism and concepts of morality and conscience have been linked (Farrell 2014, 2). The logic of 'conscience capitalism' is that the 'areas guided by conscience' such as charity should be more capitalist in order to simultaneously 'make capitalism accountable' to social externalities and also harness the resources of the market for non-profit organisations (Farrell 2014, 2-3). In this way, rather than relying on previous charitable models charities like Stoll have embraced market solutions for fundraising. More broadly, initiatives such as those discussed above, including encouraging former soldiers to become entrepreneurs, signal a wider interconnection between militarisation and 'conscience capitalism'. This in turn not only normalises market solutions to problems hitherto seen as the domain of the state but, most significantly for the arguments I advance here, also normalises 'the military' as an area of conscience reinforcing the militarist assumption that military objectives are socially valuable (Enloe 2000, 3). Crucially, in order for charities such as Stoll to engage in 'conscience capitalism' they must position their issue in terms intelligible within the market (Farrell 2014, 4). Therefore military charities articulate their 'cause' through the commodified discourse of nostalgia for things 'vintage', which provides a lifestyle repertoire within which military causes can be uncritically positioned both as something appealing in the marketplace and as issues of conscience.

Food brands have become one of a number of different charity and business models, variously inserting 'conscience' into capitalism and capitalism into conscience. Some, such as Red Lion Foods, have been set up as independent companies with the objective of raising money for military charities. These companies only market their military charity brand and donate all profits to military charities. In other cases a product with a charity affiliation is marketed as a one-off alongside a company's

standard ranges (as in the case of the Rare Tea Company). In these cases a set donation to the named charity or charities is made per unit sold. Other brands are owned by military charities themselves (Forces Sauces, for example, is a trademark of Stoll).

The positioning of military charity food brands within the commodified vintage nostalgia lifestyle discourse manifests in both the over-arching premise of supporting the military through buying particular foods – a trope redolent of First and Second World War Ministry of Information campaigns – and the use of a design aesthetic that invokes that era. The broader societal currency of vintage nostalgia is characterised by the popularity of 1940s and 1950s design aesthetics (particularly drawing on advertising and Ministry of Information campaigns from that era such as the ubiquity of the Keep Calm and Carry On slogan), craft revivals, 'up-cycling' and lifestyle TV shows including *The Great British Bake Off* and *Kirsty's Hand Made Home* (see Bramall 2013; Vennstra and Kuipers 2013). Post-2008 austerity chic and vintage nostalgia have been brought within the mainstream entertainment industries, including use by a wide range of 'retail and leisure businesses' (Bramall 2013, 196). The use of nostalgia in advertising and marketing is nothing new (Havlena and Holak 1991) and 'vintage' treatments of the British military are offered as just another way to inhabit this particular apolitical, fun and noncontroversial popular lifestyle brand, through which militarised logics such as the heroic status of soldiers and the naturalness of wanting to 'say thank you to our armed forces everyday' (Red Lion Foods) enter everyday practices of consumption.[vi]

As part of an academic vocabulary, the concept of nostalgia is 'a critical tool to interrogate the articulation of the past in the present', (Pickering and Keightly 2006,

922) and, in particular 'capriciously sentimental and variously commodified' expressions of a bygone era (Grainge 2002, 20) which form part of the search for a 'simple and stable past' to act as a refuge 'from the turbulent and chaotic present' (Lowenthal 1989, quoted in Hasian 2001, 342). Nostalgia is therefore a practice of social memory, a reaction to something lost in the present that is then sought in the past. In this sense nostalgia as a concept may seem to exhibit its origins as a description of a psychological malady (Hasian 2001, 341; Pickering and Keightly 2006, 921). Nostalgia is often seen as a 'negative' social phenomenon because it obscures the less comfortable aspects of the past (Pickering and Keightly 2006, 923-4) or, as I argue in this article, diverts from the contentious and the unsettling aspects of the recent past and present by transposing the narratives and understandings from a simpler, idealised past upon them. However, even as it does this nostalgia can have the less closed and bounded political effect of illuminating that which is missing from the present and sought in the past, framing those elements as a form of Derridiean 'present absence' (Derrida [1993] 2006; Vatter 2005, 13; Kenway et al. 2006, 5).

The soldier and military in nostalgic civil-military engagement

What account of the British soldier and military institution is produced by the nostalgic public engagement with the British military? The 'shifting representations and meanings of the soldier' are a discursive space in which 'wider civic understandings of military action and military organisations' coalesce (Jenkings et al 2012, 357; see also McCartney 2011). Within the discourse of nostalgic civil-military reconnection the soldier is intangible and functionally invisible. This runs counter to the trend King (2010, 1) describes in contemporary commemorative public

understandings of soldiers and the military, in which 'soldiers are personalized and domesticated, remembered as fathers, husbands, wives, sons and daughters' in contrast to twentieth century commemorations 'which mourned the sacrifice of anonymous individual soldiers for the nation'. It also contrasts with 'boots on the ground' documentaries such as *Our War* (BBC, 2011) described by McSorely (2012), which follow individual soldiers and present their literal viewpoint through helmetcams worn during military operations, and spaces such as the Paralympics where individual soldier's triumph over adversity is emphasised (Batts and Andrews 2012; Kelly 2013).

There were no photographs, names of or depictions of individual soldiers on any of the military charity food products analysed (or on their corresponding websites) with the exception of the Rare Tea Company. Their webpage for Battle of Britain tea displayed a 1940s thumbnail photograph of a veteran of the Battle of Britain, Terry Clark, for whom it said the tea blend had originally been created. Little in the way of further information concerning Clark or the Battle of Britain are provided. The image is positioned alongside two black and white mock 1940s advertisements for Battle of Britain Tea starring comedian Alexander Armstrong, well known for a series of sketches on *The Armstrong and Miller Show* depicting RAF Spitfire pilots during the Battle of Britain who speak in modern slang.

The image of Terry Clark is connected to these mock 1940s advertisements as part of an overall vintage design aesthetic within which Armstrong and Miller's light hearted comedic angle dominates with just enough of the 'real' military masculine authority ('authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military' [Belkin 2012, 3; see also Enloe 1993; Higate 2003]) provided by the image of Clark to confer

legitimacy. Therefore, the individualised Clark is as discursively bounded as much more generalised invocations of soldiers discussed below, reduced to an interchangeable vintage signifier of military authenticity.

Besides this case, British soldiers are present within the texts analysed as the stylised outline shape of a sauce bottle in the case of Forces Sauces, the very generalised 'our Armed Forces' (Eggs for Soldiers; Red Lion Foods), 'veterans', 'those who have served' (Forces Sauces), and 'Heroes' (Rare Tea Company). The association of the products with the British military is also achieved through signifiers such as khaki coloured packaging in the example of Eggs for Soldiers and a stencil font similar to that used on army issue equipment in the example of Forces Sauces.

The first implication of removing individual soldiers from nostalgic treatments of the British military are that such representations mollify the discursive unpredictability and unruliness of individual soldiers. For example, as Jenkings et al (2012, 360) note, the individualised commemorative activity at Wootton Bassett repatriations remained politically ambiguous due to media reports of family members saying of specific soldiers 'he died for no reason.' Achter (2010) discusses (in a US context) the disruptiveness of soldiers when they are made visible as embodied individuals physically broken by war; the experiences and bodies of such individuals 'render the story of war in efficient, emotional terms' (2010, 49) that pose 'a problem to the smooth narrative of war' (2010, 47).

Such 'unruly bodies' (Achter 2010) are removed from the discourse of nostalgic civil-military reconnection. The website homepage of Red Lion Foods, who fund Help for

Heroes, contains an embedded video which discusses a recent Red Lion Foods donation to the charity and shows Tedworth House, a Help for Heroes rehabilitation unit for injured veterans. Whilst representatives from Red Lion Foods are depicted being shown around the unit, including examining gym equipment, the unit is shown conspicuously empty of those who use it and no soldiers are shown in the video at any stage.

This absence of injured veterans is part of a broader configuration of (in)visibility, in which the damaged bodies of soldiers are made conspicuously visible only once (or if) they have completed their transformatory 'becoming' and emerge as, for example, Paralympians or participants in the Invictus Games (see Batts and Andrews 2011; Achter 2010). In line with this configuration, whilst the Red Lion Foods website representation seems to exclude the unruliness of the injured soldier body, the images of empty corridors and rehabilitation equipment also invite such bodies as a conspicuously present absence (Vatter 2005, 13). Empty corridors and gyms are filled by the spectral possibilities of the injured bodies who have or will inhabit them and the meanings of such spectres remain open and potentially disruptive to comfortable narratives of war.

Anonymising representations of a nostalgia-rehabilitated British military allows the authority of soldiers to be invoked, whilst at the same time generalising them to ahistoric and apolitical 'hero' ciphers allows any potential discursive riskiness to be circumvented. Taglines such as that for Forces Sauces, 'conceived by veterans', or the statement that Battle of Britain Tea was originally blended for Terry Clark, harness the authority of military masculinity but emphasise the more palatable, literally and

politically, apparent aptitude of the British veteran for the concoction of table sauces (to 'spice up hearty portions of Great British food') (Forces Sauces) or the appreciation of tea, to obscure potentially controversial martial skillsets. The forces of Forces Sauces are therefore constructed as authentic and authoritative repositories and guardians of a national culinary spirit (based on 'hearty portions' and 'Great British food' evoking meals dished out by the catering corps before privatisation)[vii] rather than people who go to war, kill and die. In this way logics of military superiority and social value become normalised within a nostalgic imagination of harmless, and indeed comforting, soldierly aptitudes.

The second function of anonymisation and de-individualisation is to produce a treatment of the military institution and those that comprise it so general that any potentially troubling specificity is removed. 'Our armed forces' encompasses myriad long past and more recent 'good' and 'bad' wars, conscription, national and voluntary service, the advent of private military security companies and a shifting terrain of civil-military relations. Within the discourse of nostalgic civil-military reconnection such complexities and complications are removed by references to 'heroes' or 'our armed forces'. These descriptions of the military articulate with nostalgic branding and the premise of eating a particular kind of food to help the military and the country (redolent of wartime government campaigns such as, as mentioned above, the eat less bread campaign during World War One) to create a strong link between the 'vintage', morally virtuous wars, particularly World War Two, the British military institution and rarely mentioned current wars.

Presenting these very different wars and an institution much changed compared to its incarnation 70 or 100 years ago in the same discursive package produces an equivalency which nullifies debate around the politics of current or recent wars or the role of the military as an institution. The British military and the wars in which it has been embroiled is positioned as an universal and non-contentious space of conscience which transcends politics, populated by 'heroes', service, bravery and national virtue, and, indeed, personifications of positive traits of British character such as the stiff upper lipped spitfire pilots drinking tea in the face of adversity (as in the Rare Tea Company example). All wars – past, present and future – are conflated within imaginations of a nostalgically omnipresent 'good war': a hybrid of World Wars One and Two.

Whilst this obscures more controversial narratives of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the characterisation of World Wars One and Two – and Britain's role in them – within the nostalgic discursive trope of 'vintage' reifies these past wars as 'good' (Terkel 1984) and morally straightforward, removing less comfortable aspects from public discourse. In perpetuating the image of the World Wars as the good wars this nostalgia-based memory narrative (entailed in the harnessing of wartime aesthetic within the 'vintage' trope) presents World War One and Two as templates for war fought well. This isn't just 'Tea as it used to be' (Rare Tea Company) but war as it used to be as well. In this way the vintage treatment of World War One, a conflict increasingly visible in the public discourse as its centennial approached in the summer of 2014, works to exclude more critical reappraisals which might otherwise emerge during such an anniversary. Vintage nostalgia, which pre-existed the World War One

centennial, provided a ready repertoire through which the centennial could be made intelligible and a non-critical public commemoration achieved.

Saying 'thank you everyday': commemoration, militarisation and the food shop

The first stage of this article considered how soldiers and the British military are represented within nostalgic civil-military re-engagement as it manifests in a set of military charity food brands. I discussed what public understandings of the soldier and the military were produced through these brands and the political implications of these nostalgic treatments of the contemporary British military. Next I turn attention to the political function of the mode of re-engagement being analysed here. What, I ask, are the political consequences of public engagement with the military that occurs through the purchase and consumption of military charity food brands, and how do they relate to a wider manifestation of the nostalgic rehabilitation of the military?

The charity food brands discussed above have a commemorative aspect, encouraging an active engagement between consumers and military logics and values through the practice of purchase-based repayment of 'just a little of what so many of us owe so few'[viii] (Rare Tea Company). In the context of the World War One centennial the public visibility of and involvement in commemorative acts was particularly high (the installation of 'Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red' at the Tower of London, for example, was visited by five million people)[ix]. At first glance the practice of buying military charity food brands may seem a swift, convenient and purely transactional commemoration-lite. Indeed, the convenience and lack of tangible consumer sacrifice is something the brands emphasise. Forces Sauces suggest that their way of saying

thank you is both ‘easy and enjoyable’, Eggs for Soldiers note that only ‘a small change to your weekly shop’ is required, and Red Lion Foods tagline proclaims that with their products it is possible to simultaneously ‘Eat Well and Do Good’.

However, whilst on this one hand the ‘repayment’ identified by the Rare Tea Company or the saying thank you of Red Lion Foods is apparently fleeting and transactional such superficiality of engagement belies what is, in articulation with the discourse of nostalgia, also a much more enduring and permeating repayment through observance. Military logics ‘creep into ordinary daily routines’ (Enloe 2000, 3). The repayment does not conclude with the transaction of buying the product, but continues each day that it is consumed. Forces Sauces, for example, suggest that their products are an ‘enjoyable way to make a difference everyday’, while Red Lion Foods present their products as a way to ‘say thank you everyday’. Here ‘everyday’ alludes not just to the way in which ordinary domestic actions can be transfigured as a charitable and commemorative endeavour but that this more literally infuses regular routines.

Therefore, consumers are encouraged to engage with the British military (both historic and contemporary) not just through straightforward financial contributions to military charities, but as a mindful daily ‘saying thank you’ at mealtimes as part of what, through articulation with the ministry of information aesthetic of vintage wartime, is framed as a national commemorative duty. The military signifiers of the products’ packaging, whether it is the soldier-shaped bottles of Forces Sauces or the RAF roundel of Battle of Britain Tea, remind the consumer at each encounter with the product to ‘say thank you’ (Red Lion Foods). ‘Serve with pride’, the tagline of Forces Sauces, encapsulates this repeated engagement. By buying and serving Forces Sauces

at the dinner table, the consumer is undertaking their own service to the nation, one that articulates with that (unelaborated and generalised – as discussed above) of 'our Armed Forces' (Eggs for Soldiers; Red Lion Foods). Through a commemorative logic harnessed within that of 'conscience capitalism' (Farrell 2014), a form of quasi-military service is brought into the most banal spaces of everyday civilian life.

This is made possible by the nostalgic treatments of the military, soldiers and civil-military engagement entailed in these brands. Through their over-arching concept (as described above, domestic observances akin to those championed by ministry of information campaigns during the 'vintage', 'good' wars of the first half of the Twentieth Century) and design aesthetics (Eat Well and Do Good, and RAF roundel for example) the products constitute quasi-military service within the popularity of post-2008 austerity chic and vintage nostalgia. Buying the products discussed here and engaging with the British military as it is characterised by them (as explored in the first part of this article) is produced as a way to inhabit the simpler, more authentic lifestyle of an imagined British past, a form of living that is represented within the range of entertainment mediums that draw on the 'vintage' lifestyle brand.

Commemoration is so often a space for discursive conflict; spaces of commemoration – both formal and informal – are contested, reinterpreted and negotiated as different accounts of the immediate or more distant past play out (see for example, various discussions of the politics of memory at Ground Zero – Lisle 2004; Gutman 2009). However, the rehabilitation of the British military through a nostalgic civil-military engagement, including the quasi-military service entailed in buying a military charity food brand, occurs within a depoliticising of war commemoration in contemporary

Britain, in which potentially contentious elements are stripped out of the 'culture of remembrance' (Imber and Fraser 2011). This depoliticised commemorative discourse is epitomised by the military charity Help for Heroes, to whom – as noted above – some of the brands I discuss in this article donate. Identified by Jenkings et al as a key facet of the post-Iraq rehabilitation of the British military, the charity was 'founded in 2007 with support from the Ministry of Defence and senior military figures to support service personnel wounded in recent wars' (Jenkings et al 2012, 361). Help for Heroes – the most well known of newer military charities – is predicated on being 'strictly non-political and non-critical… This means that H4H gives everyone an opportunity to show support for the Armed Forces without having to comment on the conflicts in which they fight' (Help for Heroes, quoted in Imber and Fraser 2011, 386; see also the Help for Heroes website FAQ). [x]

However, this refusal to engage with the overt politics of the rights or wrongs of contemporary wars cannot be anything other than intensely political. Rhetoric identifying the military as 'heroes', 'who have made sacrifices on our behalf' (as stated on the Help for Heroes website), and to whom we have a duty to repay a debt (Rare Tea Company) and 'say thank you everyday' (Red Lion Foods) articulate with the Ministry of Information discourses from World War One and Two which are fetishized within the mainstream contemporary popularity of vintage nostalgia. As explored above, this nostalgic discourse enables the contentiousness of current or recent wars to be replaced by allusions to the past vintage wars complete with their established discourse of moral virtuousness (Terkel 1984; Bodnar 2009; Hasien 2001). Furthermore, the continuing salience of the '1919 model' of formal remembrance (Imber and Fraser 2011, 385) and revival of commemorative practices from the past

such as ‘homecoming parades and regimental funerals’ (Imber and Fraser 2011, 386; also discussed by Jenkings et al 2012), within which charities like Help for Heroes and the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan are a highly visible presence, further strengthen the link between contemporary and vintage wars.

The military food brands discussed in this article, therefore, function as part of a broader set of discursive practices which have produced a depoliticised, nostalgic commemorative engagement with the contemporary military in British society which rehabilitates the British military by focusing attention away from the political debates around recent or current wars and produces militarised modes of consumption. Whilst Imber and Fraser claim that contemporary remembrance has transcended ‘disputes over the legitimacy of individual conflicts’ (2011, 386) my analysis suggests that it has, for now and for the most part, simply obscured them[xi].

Conclusion

I have argued that as part of a broader rehabilitation of the British military and its wars post-Iraq the British military is being encountered through the notionally apolitical, lifestyle discourse of vintage nostalgia, mobilised to market ‘causes’ related to the British military within a ‘conscience capitalism’ framework. Commodified nostalgic modes of civil-military engagement present a generalised account of the military and the soldiers that comprise it, nullifying the potential discursive unruliness of individualising and specific treatments. Furthermore, nostalgic civil-military engagement entails a commemorative logic in which forms of quasi-military service are brought into the most banal spaces of everyday civilian life.

In both of these aspects politically contentious recent wars (Afghanistan and Iraq) are obscured, replaced – through the discourse of nostalgia – with allusions to the morally virtuous 'vintage wars' of the first half of the Twentieth Century. This discursive move occurs as a form of militarisation, which normalises military values and logics into the banal spaces of the weekly food shop and the daily dinner table. Such discourses attribute an inherent value and irreproachability to soldiers and the military and prevents them from being fully evaluated in connection with what they do; which remains, in significant part, war fighting.

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[i] At the time of writing Sainsbury's was not stocking any military charity brands – this was confirmed in a personal correspondence with the company on 6 August 2014.

[ii] In the US case, the military has a long history of ties with civilian brands – see Fischer (2014, 202). A full discussion is outside of the remit of this article, however brands that market themselves through association with and donation to military charities, such as Salute American Vodka, do not utilize the same discourse of nostalgia that I identify here. Comparison with the US case warrants further scholarly attention however.

[iii] In this article all quotations and references to material derived from websites refer to these websites as of September 9 2014.

[iv] In this example the ubiquitous and nostalgic 'your country needs you' Lord Kitchener poster is subtly referenced in the phrase 'our education system needs you'.

[v] In this article I am following Enloe's line of questioning in *Maneuvers* (2000), which begins with the question 'how can they militarize a can of soup?'

[vi] This construction of military logics as non-political represents a contrast to gritty and often more politically ambiguous and complex entertainment representations of the contemporary British military elsewhere, including television documentaries such as *Our War* (2011) and *Fighting on the Frontline* (2011) and British made films such as *The Mark of Cain* (2007) and *The Patrol* (2013)

[vii] Catering for the MOD has been contracted to multinational catering services giant Eurest.

[viii] The reference to 'the few' borrows from Winston Churchill's speech regarding the Battle of Britain pilots.

[ix] The installation was itself an exercise in conscience capitalism, with the exhibit sold off one ceramic poppy at a time to raise money for five military charities.

[x] This position has much in common with the Support the Troops discourse in the United States which is so strong that in order to be legitimate antiwar groups must avow that they 'support the troops [and] oppose the war' – see Beamish, Molotch and Flacks (1995)

[xi] Debates over whether the symbol of the poppy has been hijacked for militaristic ends suggest that the commemoration of war in the UK remains, to some extent, a discursive space for contestation.